

Modern-Day Zambia

TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

After a long and sustained struggle for independence, spearheaded first by Harry Nkumbula's African National Congress (ANC) and then by Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party (UNIP), Northern Rhodesia became the independent state of Zambia on the 24th of October 1964. Kaunda became its first president and its first independent African Head of State.

POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Because there is a culture among Jews of active social involvement, many played major roles in both local government and in the political life of Northern Rhodesia. All the major towns were represented by at least one Jewish mayor, among whom were Maurice Rabb in Livingstone, Jack Fischer in Lusaka, Maurice Gersh in Kitwe, Nathan Schulman in Ndola, and Denis Figov in Luanshya. Sir Roy Welensky, who became prime minister of the ill-fated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was of partial Jewish descent.

Jewish immigrant Simon Zukas was a commanding and influential figure in the political life of Northern Rhodesia and in the history of the independence of Zambia. Born in Ukmerge, Lithuania, he arrived in Northern Rhodesia at the age of thirteen in 1938. After service in World War II, he trained as a civil engineer during which time he became closely involved with African nationalists in the campaign against the establishment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Accused of disturbing law and order by the Colonial Authority, he was imprisoned in Livingstone for 8 months in 1952 and then deported to the United Kingdom. While in exile, he became a supporter of President Kenneth Kaunda and the United National Independence Party (UNIP). With Independence in 1964, he returned to a hero's welcome in Zambia where he settled to devote himself to building his civil engineering business and to commercial farming.

Some 25 years later, in 1990, Zukas returned to politics as one of the leaders of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), and when this party came to power in 1991 he became the Deputy Minister in State House, then Minister of Agriculture and later of Public Works. He retired in 1996 but returned to politics once again in 2001 as a member of the Oasis Forum which successfully opposed the attempt of President Frederick Chiluba to run for an illegal third term. Thereafter Zukas served as chairman of a new opposition party, the Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD), until 2005. He remains one of the most highly respected public figures in Zambia today.

Zambian independence brought restrictions on businesses owned by non-residents and this resulted in an exodus of the majority of those members of the Jewish community who retained British or South African citizenship; the result of this was that many Jewish stores passed into Asian and then Zambian ownership. A small number of Jews did stay on and they continued to make a significant contribution to the country.



Simon Zukas speaks at the first Convention of the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy in 1991



Simon Zukas returns to a hero's welcome in Ndola in 1964



Prize giving by Simon Zukas, Minister of Agriculture, at the Agricultural Show, Lusaka, 1993



Addressing a rally in Chawama as Interim Chairman of the Forum for Democracy and Development in 2001